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ON-GOING SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY IN THE ADUMIM “BLOC” AND THE E-1 AREA

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BACKGROUND PAPER

While Israeli and Palestinian leaders meet in advance of the US-sponsored international conference scheduled for November 2007 to discuss core issues for ending the conflict between them, Israel brazenly continues to create facts on the ground that are fast foreclosing the two-state solution. Most notable among them is the Adumim settlement “bloc” and the E-1 settlement area.

On 24 September, the Israeli army issued a military order confiscating 1,128 dunums (279 acres) of Palestinian land located between East Jerusalem and Ma’ale Adumim settlement for the construction of a separate road for Palestinians linking the southern West Bank with the eastern and northern West Bank instead of the existing roads that pass through the E-1 area and East Jerusalem.

The new “alternate” road is part of an Israeli plan to prevent Palestinians from asserting sovereignty over Palestinian territory and to obstruct the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. Only a comprehensive freeze of all settlement activity – starting with E-1 – can preserve the two-state solution and keep hope alive for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

On the hills just east of Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem lies one of the most important areas for Palestinian development and natural growth, and for the viability of a future Palestinian state. As the geographic center of the West Bank, it is also one of the most strategic areas in the West Bank, overlooking both the Holy City and the Jordan Valley. Here, as elsewhere in the West Bank, illegal Israeli settlement activity is ensuring that Israeli territorial designs prevail over Palestinian interests and international efforts for peace.

Throughout this area, Israel has established a number of **illegal settlements**, including Ma’ale Adumim, Almon, Kefar Adumim, Alon and Qedar, as well as the industrial settlement of Mishor Adumim, with a combined population of 35,000 settlers. The largest of these, **Ma’ale Adumim**, has a population of some 31,700 settlers and a jurisdictional area of 50 km², similar to Tel Aviv’s municipal area. Still, the settlement continues to grow. As of August 2006, **485 new housing units** were under construction in Ma’ale Adumim, while an additional **360 new units** were tendered in 2006. This expansion is part of a plan to increase the settler population of Ma’ale Adumim to **70,000 by 2008**.

Since 1975, when Ma'ale Adumim was first established with a few isolated caravans, Israel has been expanding the settlements in this area in order to consolidate its control over Palestinian East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, and to create contiguity between these two strategic areas of the West Bank. In that time, Israel has built an elaborate **road network** to connect Ma'ale Adumim and its satellite settlements with one another and with West Jerusalem, as well as a **major transnational highway** (Road #1) running through Adumim eastward to the Jordan Valley.

In order to strengthen these settlements and facilitate their future expansion, Israel is currently building a **Wall** around Ma'ale Adumim and its satellite settlements. Penetrating 14 km east of the 1967 border, the Wall will effectively annex the Adumim settlements to Israel, incorporating 61 km² of Palestinian land, complete the encirclement of Palestinian East Jerusalem and sever the West Bank in half.

To further strengthen settlement contiguity between the Adumim settlements and West Jerusalem, Israel has developed an ambitious expansion plan known as "**E-1**". The plan is to be built on **12,442 dunums** (3,110 acres) of Palestinian land belonging to the villages of Anata, At-Tor, Issawiya, Abu Dis and Al-Eizariya. Although the plan encompasses a wide area, it is planned to have **3,500 housing units** (approximately 15,000 settlers), with most of the land slated for large-scale infrastructure and commercial development, including an industrial park, office buildings, entertainment and sports centers, 10 hotels and a regional cemetery.

First ordered by then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1994 in the midst of the Oslo peace process, the E-1 plan was officially declared in 1999 when then Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Arens approved the expansion of Ma'ale Adumim's jurisdictional boundaries to incorporate the area between it and the Israeli-defined municipal boundary of Jerusalem. The land had already been confiscated from its Palestinian owners several years earlier. In 2002, the Defense Ministry's Civil Administration approved the outline plan for the E-1 area. Then Defence Minister Ben Eliezer subsequently **undertook to the U.S. Administration** not to implement the plan. Israel gave the U.S. similar assurances in Spring 2005.

Nonetheless, in July 2004, Israel's Ministry of Housing and Construction began land-leveling work in the E-1 area for new roadways and for site preparation for a new police station. Since that time, Israel has completed work on **two police stations**, the first one between Az-Zaim and Anata and the second one on the eastern edge of the E-1 corridor that connects E-1 with Ma'ale Adumim off of Road #1.

Most recently, the Israeli army issued a military order for the confiscation of **1,128 dunums** (279 acres) of Palestinian land located between East Jerusalem and Ma'ale Adumim for the construction of an **“alternate” road** for Palestinians linking the southern West Bank to the eastern and northern parts of the West Bank. The confiscated land belongs to the Palestinian villages of Abu Dis, al-Sawahra, Nebi Musa and al-Khan Alhamar. The route of the road will roughly run parallel to the southern and eastern sections of the Adumim Wall *outside* the Adumim “bloc”. It will serve to eventually exclude Palestinians from using Road #1 that passes through the E-1 area and the Adumim “bloc” and Road #60 that passes through East Jerusalem, thereby keeping Palestinians out of East Jerusalem. The route of the road reportedly resembles a road appearing on a map prepared by Ma'ale Adumim's municipality as far back as April 2005. Other roads are also planned as part of Israel's scheme of **“transportation contiguity”** for Palestinians, while illegal settlers will enjoy the benefits of genuine territorial contiguity between the Adumim “bloc” and West Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, the approximately 3,000 Palestinian **Jahalin Bedouin**, who have lived in the area between East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley since the 1950s, are facing an existential threat. After originally being expelled from the Naqab (Negev) in 1948, the Jahalin, many of whom were again displaced from the area of Ma'ale Adumim in 1998, are once again under threat of forced displacement due to the expansion of Ma'ale Adumim and ongoing construction of E-1 and the Adumim Wall.

The negative impacts of the Adumim “bloc” and the E-1 Plan on the prospects of a viable, contiguous and independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital cannot be underestimated. If fully implemented, E-1 would deny East Jerusalem its last remaining area for future growth and economic development. In addition, the location of E-1 and its massive size would assure Israeli control over *the* key junction area connecting the northern part of the West Bank to the south. Moreover, even if the E-1 Plan is not implemented, the Adumim Wall's *de facto* annexation of the area to Israel would permanently sever East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank and cut the West Bank in two, thereby destroying any chance for a viable two-state solution or for a **Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem**.

All Israeli settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) is **illegal**, as it violates Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the prohibition against acquiring territory by force, the Palestinian right of self-determination, as well as UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The United Nations, the International Court of Justice, and the overwhelming majority of states share this view.

Therefore, the international community has an obligation to prevent Israel from carrying out any further settlement activity throughout all Palestinian territory occupied by Israel in 1967, including East Jerusalem, beginning with the Adumim “bloc”, the E-1 Plan and the Adumim Wall. A genuine **settlement freeze**, such as the one called for in the Quartet Roadmap, would ensure that no further harm is done to the two-state solution prior to actual negotiations. Such a freeze should include an end to all:

- settlement and settlement-related **construction** in the OPT, especially in East Jerusalem, including the Wall;
- government and private **financing** and incentives for settlements and settlers;
- settlement **planning** and **building permit and tender issuance** for new and existing settlements; and
- **land confiscations**, home demolitions and other property destruction, regardless of the pretext.